

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TAGS: ELAB,PINT, IS

SUBJECT: STRAINS WITHIN THE HISTADRUT EXECUTIVE

1. SUMMARY: DISSATISFIED WITH THE CURRENT HEAD OF THE HISTADRUT TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT, SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL HAS APPROACHED AMOS EIRAN, THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE, AND SEVERAL HISTADRUT EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AS TO THEIR AVAILABILITY AS REPLACEMENT CANDIDATES. ALTHOUGH NO CHANGES ARE LIKELY BEFORE THE NEXT HISTADRUT ELECTIONS AT THE END OF 1977, MESHEL'S MANEUVERS REFLECT HIS AWARENESS THAT HE MAY FACE A SERIOUS CHALLENGE AT THAT TIME. EIRAN, REPORTEDLY FEELING UNHAPPY ABOUT HIS RELATIONS WITH RABIN, MAY BECOME INTERESTED IN RETURNING TO HISTADRUT. A MAJOR LEADERSHIP FIGHT WITHIN HISTADRUT COULD AFFECT THE ALIGNMENT AND GOVERNMENT-HISTADRUT RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. HAARETZ OF AUGUST 3 CARRIED A REPORT THAT HISTADRUT SECRETARY GENERAL YERUHAM MESHEL HAD OFFERED AMOS EIRAN, THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE PRIME MINSTER'S OFFICE, THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE HASTADRUT TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT. THAT POSITION IS NOW HELD BY URIEL ABRAMOWITZ, WHOSE RELATIONS WITH MESHEL HAVE BEEN NOTABLY DETERIORATING FOR SOME TIME.

3. EIRAN, WHO HAD BEEN MESHEL'S ASSISTANT WHEN HE (MESHEL)

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HEADED THE TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT (PRIOR TO EIRAN'S ASSIGN-

MENT AS LABOR ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON), ADMITTED THAT SUCH AN OFFER HAD BEEN MADE TO HIM IN 1974 WHEN MESHEL WAS ELECTED SECRETARY GENERAL. (EIRAN WAS THEN DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS' PENSION AND INSURANCE FUND IN THE HISTADRUT AND MOVED TO HIS PRESENT JOB IN 1975). HOWEVER, HE DENIED THAT THE OFFER HAD BEEN RECENTLY RENEWED AND DECLARED THAT HE COULD NOT ACCEPT SUCH A POSITION "WHILE THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT REMAINED IN OFFICE."

4. ON AUGUST 4 ABRAMOWITZ ISSUED A STATEMENT SAYING THAT NO CHANGES IN THE TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT OF EXECUTIVE BUREAU WERE POSSIBLE UNTIL AFTER THE HISTADRUT ELECTION, NOW SCHEDULED TO FOLLOW THE 1977 KNESSET ELECTIONS. HE SAID THAT MESHEL'S ABILITY TO CHANGE THE EXECUTIVE BOARD WOULD DEPEND ON THE HISTADRUT ELECTION OUTCOME.

5. MESHEL REMAINED POINTEDLY SILENT ABOUT THE HAARETZ REPORT, WHICH HAD HINTED THAT HE HAD RECENTLY REOPENED THE DISCUSSION IN ORDER TO EMBARRASS ABRAMOWITZ. THE LATTER IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN RATHER DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS WITH A NUMBER OF DISAFFECTED PROFESSIONAL AND CIVIL SERVICE GROUPS WHO ARE DEMANDING WAGE AND FRINGE BENEFIT ADJUSTMENTS, WHICH THEY CLAIM HAD BEEN PROMISED THEM, AND ARE THREATENING A NEW WAVE OF STRIKES IF THEY FAIL TO GET SATISFACTION.

6. ACCORDING TO HISTADRUT SOURCES, MESHEL WOULD LIKE TO SEE HIS PROTEGE EIRAN RETURN TO THE HISTADRUT AND EIRAN REPORTEDLY REMAINS INTERESTED BECAUSE HE SEES THIS AS A POSSIBLE AVENUE FOR ENTERING POLITICS. MOREOVER, ACCORDING TO ONE OF HIS FORMER HISTADRUT ASSOCIATES, HE IS SAID TO HAVE BECOME SOMEWHAT UNHAPPY WITH HIS PERSONAL RELATIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER RABIN. THUS, WHILE HE HAS PUBLICLY DENIED THE STORY OF THE RENEWED OFFER BY MESHEL, HE HAS NOT CLOSED THE DOOR ON EVENTUALLY ACCEPTING SUCH AN OFFER.

7. THE SAME HISTADRUT SOURCE HAS TOLD US THAT MESHEL HAS ALSO SOUNDED OUT GIDEON BEN ISRAEL, CHAIRMAN OF THE ACADEMIC WORKERS' DEPARTMENT, AND HISTADRUT TREASURER ISRAEL KEISAR AS POTENTIAL CANDIDATES FOR THE IMPORTANT TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT JOB, IN RECENT MONTHS MESHEL HAS INCREASINGLY ARROGATED TO HIMSELF THE FUNCTIONS OF CHAIRMAN OF THE TRADE UNION

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DEPARTMENT, FREQUENTLY INTERVENING PERSONALLY IN ABRAMOWITZ'S NEGOTIATING AND CONCILIATING EFFORTS WHILE COMPLAINING THAT HE HAS TO DO ABRAMOWITZ'S JOB. ACCORDING TO THIS SOURCE, MESHEL IS ALREADY VERY CONSCIOUS OF THE REELECTION STRUGGLE WHICH HE MAY FACE IN 1977 AND IS SEEKING TO ENHANCE HIS PERSONAL IMAGE AS THE "GREAT PEACE MAKER AND SETTLER OF CONFLICTS" IN THE HISTADRUT. THIS HAS TENDED TO SHARPEN HIS CONFLICT WITH ABRAMOWITZ, WHO HAS PERSONAL BACKING FROM

A NUMBER OF UNIONS. MESHEL WOULD PREFER AS HEAD OF THE TRADE UNION DEPARTMENT A PERSON DEPENDENT ON HIM FOR SUPPORT AND THUS MORE SUPPORTIVE OF THE ROLE HE WISHES TO PLAY. ALL THREE CANDIDATES WHOM HE REPORTEDLY CONSULTED WOULD FILL THAT BILL. EIRAN HAS THE ADDED ATTRACTIVENESS OF HIS PRESENT HIGH POSITION AND OF BEING RELATIVELY YOUNG.

8. COMMENT: MESHEL'S OWN POSITION, BASED ON HIS REPUTATION AS THE GREAT COMPROMISER, MAY NOT BE COMPLETELY SECURE. WITH MOUNTING ECONOMIC DISSATISFACTION WITHIN THE HISTADRUT AND THE GROWING CRITICISM OF HIS TENDENCY TO COMPROMISE WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON KEY ECONOMIC ISSUES AT THE EXPENSE OF THE MEMBER'S INTERESTS, MESHEL MAY FIND HIMSELF SERIOUSLY CHALLENGED AT THE 1977 ELECTIONS. REGARDLESS HOW THE LABOR PARTY AND THE ALIGNMENT FARE IN THE KNESSET ELECTIONS, THEY MAY LOSE GROUND IN THE HISTADRUT, PERHAPS EVEN REVERSING THE PAST TREND WHICH GAVE LABOR AND THE ALIGNMENT A SOMEWHAT LARGER MAJORITY MARGIN IN THE HISTADRUT THAN IN THE KNESSET. THIS COULD LEAD TO MESHEL'S REPLACEMENT OR, MORE LIKELY, COULD WEAKEN HIS POSITION SUFFICIENTLY THAT HE WOULD NOT BE IN A POSITION TO DICTATE THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEXT EXECUTIVE BOARD. AS A RESULT THE RELATION BETWEEN THE HISTADRUT AND THE GOVERNMENT COULD ALSO CHANGE.

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